



Knowledge and Use of Export Assistance Services by Agribusiness

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In today's era of tightening federal budgets, export assistance services provided by the federal government are coming under closer scrutiny. To date, little is known about what types of firms know about these services and use these services. This study uses a unique firm level data set to analyze differences in knowledge and use of many export assistance services provided by the federal government. Results indicate that the type of firms that are intended to be the target of these services have less knowledge and use the services less frequently than the firms not targeted. © 1997 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

In today's global economy exports play an important role in the success of many US agribusinesses. To be a successful exporter requires resources to develop a working knowledge of international marketing and logistics. However, many agribusiness firms do not have the necessary resources to develop this knowledge base. To assist these firms, there are private and public organizations that provide

assistance services to help make exporting viable for all agribusinesses. The federal agency that provides the most export assistance services to agribusinesses is the Foreign Agriculture Service (FAS) of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The services provided by FAS range from providing trade leads to sponsoring trade shows to financial assistance with export promotion.

Given the increased concern over the federal budget deficit, closer attention is being paid to what services the government should and should not be providing. For example, the Market Promotion Program (MPP) of the USDA has been criticized by the General Accounting Office (GAO) for providing export assistance funds to large firms that may not need the funds. More recently in the August 1996 issue of *Readers Digest*, T. J. Rodgers¹ cites large companies such as McDonalds, Dole Fresh Fruit, Sunkist, Gallo Wines, and Tyson as being recipients of large portions of MPP funds, the implication again being that firms such as these may not need export assistance.

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A first step in reducing the cost and improving the allocation of export assistance services would be to determine what export assistance services firms do and do not use. However, not all exporting agribusinesses will find the same assistance services beneficial. Due to different firm characteristics, one exporting agribusiness may know about and use different export assistance services than another exporting agribusiness. With knowledge about what services different firms need, certain export assistance services may be better designed to fit the needs of different firms, (e.g., some assistance services may tailor to the needs of firms which are more experienced with exporting).

Study Objectives

This study examines the knowledge about and use of export assistance services across firm size and the level of export experience. The first objective of this study is to determine if there is any difference in knowledge of export assistance services across firm size and the firm's level of export experience. The second objective of the study is to determine, for those firms which have knowledge of a particular assistance service, if there is any difference in use of that service across firm size and export experience level. This information will provide a better understanding of the export assistance needs of agribusinesses by size and export experience.

Previous Literature

Previous research concerning export assistance to agribusiness has concentrated on the allocation of funds among market development activities, commodities, and export markets. Halliburton and Henneberry have conducted most of the work in this area, but none of this work has been firm level analysis. Alternatively, where there has been firm level analysis in the general business literature, it has not focused on agribusiness.

Halliburton and Henneberry² examined the non-price promotion programs for US red meat exports using data collected from FAS accounting records for the Commodity Market Development Program

(CMDP) and the Targeted Export Assistance Program/Market Promotion (TEA/MPP) ranging from 1986 through 1991. Their results suggested that the largest majority of TEA/MPP and CMDP funds went to generic consumer promotions. In a similar study Halliburton and Henneberry³ studied the US non-price market development activities for peanuts and found that the majority of TEA/MPP and CMDP funds were accounted for as branded consumer promotions to Western Europe.

Halliburton and Henneberry⁴ conducted a comparative analysis of non-price export promotion programs for US red meat and wheat using FAS data for the TEA/MPP and CMDP ranging from 1986 through 1988. The results of their study revealed that there are differences in market development strategies for bulk versus value-added products (wheat being a bulk commodity and red meat being a value-added commodity). Specifically they found that the majority of wheat promotions were accounted for as trade servicing and technical assistance activities in lesser developed countries whereas red meat promotions consisted of primarily generic consumer promotions to higher developed countries.

There has been some firm level analysis in the general business literature. Howard and Herremans⁵ surveyed 1179 small US firms which were successfully exporting. They found that the eight agencies or groups which were the most helpful to these small exporters were foreign distributors, trade fairs, US Department of Commerce, US banks, State Department of Commerce, foreign banks, US Chamber of Commerce, and foreign manufacturers.

De Noble, Castaldi, and Moliver⁶ surveyed 1478 small business New Jersey-based exporters and found that the most important services that these small business exporters desired from export trading companies were the ability to discover or open new foreign markets, the establishment of personnel contacts with potential foreign buyers and knowledge of the foreign markets' competitive conditions.

Naidu and Rao⁷ surveyed 2300 small to medium sized manufacturing firms in the US concerning their attitudes towards exporting and various export assistance programs. The authors found that differences existed between non-exporters, those

who intended to export, those who exported sporadically, and those who regularly exported with respect to the perceived importance of factors in initiating or expanding exports as well as the familiarity and use of export assistance programs.

From this review there appears to be a gap in the literature with regard to firm level analysis concentrating on the knowledge and use of export assistance services by US agribusinesses. The analysis presented in the next section helps fill this gap.

Data and Results

Data used to conduct the analysis were compiled from FAS records and from MPP participants via a mail questionnaire. Foreign Agriculture Service records were used to develop a mailing list of 764 US firms that participated in the 1993–1994 program year MPP (branded portion). A mail survey was sent in September 1995. Dillman's method for mail surveys was used⁸ (Dillman). Approximately one week after the initial mailing a follow up postcard was sent to non-respondents. About two weeks later, a second mailing was sent to non-respondents. In conjunction with the second mailing, non-respondents were called with a telephone reminder. In the questionnaire, firms were questioned about the MPP application process, changes in exports during the program year, perceived export barriers and assistance needs, exporting plans and strategies, knowledge and use of export assistance services, and general characteristics of the firm. Of the 764 firms surveyed, 230 returned usable responses. Survey questions were developed through interaction with FAS officials and a focus group consisting of representatives from agribusinesses. After the survey questions were developed questionnaires were mailed to 20 pre-test firms. These firms were asked for comments and suggestions concerning the questions. Pre-test responses did not suggest any significant changes in the questionnaire.

Procedure of Analysis

Survey respondents were first grouped into three size categories. Firms with less than 100 employees

and with sales less than \$5,000,000 were classified as small. Firms with more than 500 employees and sales of \$50,000,000 or greater were classified as large. Firms not meeting the large or small criteria were classified as medium size firms. Firms were also grouped according to their level of export experience. Firms with less than 5 years of exporting experience were considered new to exporting. Firms with between 5 and 10 years of export experience were considered moderately experienced exporters. Firms with more than 10 years of exporting experience were considered highly experienced exporters.

Using the above categories, respondents were then grouped according to whether or not they had knowledge about assistance services. Respondents who had knowledge of assistance services were then grouped based on whether they had used the assistance services or not. Descriptive statistics were then conducted on the sample in order to determine the percentage of firms in each grouping which had knowledge of and used the export assistance services. Chi-squared tests were then conducted to determine if firms of different sizes and export experience differ in their knowledge of alternative export assistance services. Chi-squared tests were also conducted to determine if firms of different sizes and export experience differ in their use of alternative export assistance services.

Knowledge of Services by Firm Size

The percentages of small, medium, and large firms which were knowledgeable about the different export assistance services are listed in Table I. These results reveal that over half of the firms in each group were knowledgeable about each export assistance service except national trade bank data; slightly less than half of medium and large firms had knowledge of this service. More than 90% of firms in all three categories were knowledgeable about assistance services provided by freight forwarders. More than 80% of firms in all three groups were familiar with trade leads, buyer alerts, or buyer supply lists, FAS trade shows, state departments of agriculture, federal agencies other than FAS, export trading/management companies, banks, marketing research firms, and other private

Table 1. Knowledge of Export Assistance Services by Firm Size.

Service	Percent Knowledgeable About Service by Size ^a			Chi-Square
	Small	Medium	Large	
One-stop Information Service (Trade Assistance & Promotion Office or AgExport Action Kits)	62.71 (N1 = 59)	61.96 (N2 = 92)	66.67 (N3 = 21)	.163
Trade Leads, Buyer Alerts, or Buyer and Supplier Lists	81.36 (N1 = 59)	84.78 (N2 = 92)	90.48 (N3 = 21)	1.008
Trade Shows Organized by FAS	88.14 (N1 = 59)	95.65 (N2 = 92)	100 (N3 = 21)	5.027 ^b
FAS Publications for Exporters (ex: Foreign Market Information Reports, AGExporter Magazine)	77.97 (N1 = 59)	85.87 (N2 = 92)	95.00 (N3 = 20)	3.672
Direct Assistance from Overseas FAS Attaches	76.27 (N1 = 59)	76.09 (N2 = 92)	80.95 (N3 = 21)	.238
Technical Assistance (Import Requirements Information)	65.52 (N1 = 58)	61.96 (N2 = 92)	71.43 (N3 = 21)	.723
USDA Agencies other than FAS	54.24 (N1 = 59)	57.30 (N2 = 89)	80.00 (N3 = 20)	4.303
State Departments of Agriculture	93.10 (N1 = 58)	88.89 (N2 = 90)	95.24 (N3 = 21)	1.276
Federal Agencies Other than USDA (ex: Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration)	83.05 (N1 = 59)	84.44 (N2 = 90)	85.00 (N3 = 20)	.068
State Agencies Other than Agriculture (ex: State Department of Commerce or Economic Development)	72.88 (N1 = 59)	76.92 (N2 = 91)	90.48 (N3 = 21)	2.731
Chamber of Commerce	72.88 (N1 = 59)	77.78 (N2 = 90)	71.43 (N3 = 21)	.652
Export-import Bank (EXIM Bank)	72.88 (N1 = 59)	71.11 (N2 = 90)	80.95 (N3 = 21)	.836
World Trade Centers or Associations	84.75 (N1 = 59)	71.91 (N2 = 89)	85.71 (N3 = 21)	4.230
Freight Forwarders	91.53 (N1 = 59)	93.41 (N2 = 91)	95.24 (N3 = 21)	.381
Export Trading/Management Companies	87.93 (N1 = 58)	88.76 (N2 = 89)	95.24 (N3 = 21)	.914
Banks	89.47 (N1 = 57)	90.00 (N2 = 90)	90.48 (N3 = 21)	.020
Marketing Research Firms	88.14 (N1 = 59)	91.01 (N2 = 89)	95.24 (N3 = 21)	.962
Private Firms With Export Experience	89.66 (N1 = 58)	94.44 (N2 = 90)	90.00 (N3 = 20)	1.296
Foreign Government Agencies	71.93 (N1 = 57)	76.40 (N2 = 89)	71.43 (N3 = 21)	.464
National Trade Data Bank	56.14 (N1 = 57)	44.94 (N2 = 89)	47.62 (N3 = 21)	1.764

^aN1, N2, and N3 are the number of responses in each size category.

^bSignificant at .10 probability.

Table 2. Knowledge of Export Assistance Services by Firm's Export Experience Level.

Service	Percent Knowledgeable About Service by Export Experience ^a			Chi-square
	New-to-Export	Moderately Experienced	Highly Experienced	
One-stop Information Service (Trade Assistance & Promotion Office or AgExport Action Kits)	54.41 (N1 = 68)	66.67 (N2 = 36)	69.12 (N3 = 68)	3.440
Trade Leads, Buyer Alerts, or Buyer and Supplier Lists	79.41 (N1 = 68)	94.44 (N2 = 36)	83.82 (N3 = 68)	4.039
Trade Shows Organized by FAS	88.24 (N1 = 68)	94.44 (N2 = 36)	98.53 (N3 = 68)	6.072 ^b
FAS Publications for Exporters (ex: Foreign Market Information Reports, AGExporter Magazine)	77.94 (N1 = 68)	83.33 (N2 = 36)	91.04 (N3 = 67)	4.384
Direct Assistance from Overseas FAS Attaches	70.59 (N1 = 68)	72.22 (N2 = 36)	85.29 (N3 = 67)	4.642 ^c
Technical Assistance (Import Requirements Information)	58.82 (N1 = 68)	54.29 (N2 = 35)	75.00 (N3 = 68)	5.811 ^c
USDA Agencies other than FAS	56.06 (N1 = 66)	55.56 (N2 = 36)	63.64 (N3 = 66)	.998
State Departments of Agriculture	85.07 (N1 = 67)	97.22 (N2 = 36)	93.94 (N3 = 66)	5.334 ^c
Federal Agencies Other than USDA (ex: Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration)	82.09 (N1 = 67)	86.11 (N2 = 36)	84.85 (N3 = 66)	.337
State Agencies Other than Agriculture (ex: State Department of Commerce or Economic Development)	68.66 (N1 = 67)	88.89 (N2 = 36)	79.41 (N3 = 68)	5.760 ^c
Chamber of Commerce	65.15 (N1 = 66)	77.78 (N2 = 36)	83.82 (N3 = 68)	6.429 ^b
Export-import Bank (EXIM Bank)	65.67 (N1 = 67)	83.33 (N2 = 36)	74.63 (N3 = 67)	3.860
World Trade Centers or Associations	79.10 (N1 = 67)	71.43 (N2 = 35)	80.60 (N3 = 67)	1.195
Freight Forwarders	88.06 (N1 = 67)	94.44 (N2 = 36)	97.06 (N3 = 68)	4.338
Export Trading/Management Companies	86.57 (N1 = 67)	82.35 (N2 = 34)	95.52 (N3 = 67)	4.950 ^c
Banks	83.58 (N1 = 67)	97.06 (N2 = 34)	92.54 (N3 = 67)	5.369 ^c
Marketing Research Firms	88.06 (N1 = 67)	91.43 (N2 = 35)	92.54 (N2 = 35)	.825
Private Firms With Export Experience	89.55 (N1 = 67)	94.12 (N2 = 34)	94.03 (N3 = 67)	1.146
Foreign Government Agencies	68.66 (N1 = 67)	82.35 (N2 = 34)	75.76 (N3 = 66)	2.342
National Trade Data Bank	51.52 (N1 = 66)	51.43 (N2 = 35)	45.45 (N3 = 66)	.581

^a N1, N2, and N3 = number of responses in each size category.

^b significant at .05 probability.

^c significant at .10 probability.

firms with export experience. The chi-square tests of association reveal that the only service where knowledge has an association with firm size is that of trade shows organized by FAS. Larger firms appear to be more knowledgeable of such trade shows than smaller firms.

Knowledge of Services by Export Experience

The percentages of new to export firms, moderate exporters, and experienced exporters who are knowledgeable about export assistance services are listed in Table II. Over half the firms at each level of exporting experience were knowledgeable about all the assistance services except for national trade bank data, about 45% of experienced exporters were familiar with this assistance service. At least 80% of all firms at each experience level were familiar with FAS trade shows, state departments of agriculture, USDA agencies other than FAS, freight forwarders, export trading/management companies, banks, marketing research firms, and other private firms with export experience. The chi-square tests revealed that there is an association between the export experience level of the firm and the knowledge of FAS trade shows, state departments of agriculture, chambers of commerce, export trading/management companies, and banks. The results suggest that more experience in exporting is associated with more knowledge of the availability of these services.

Use of Services by Firm Size

Of those small, medium, and large firms who are familiar with the export assistance services, the percentages of firms in each group who actually used the services are listed in Table III. Over 75% of all small, medium, and large firms who knew about freight forwarders as an export assistance service use them for assistance, and 60% of firms in each size category who were familiar with FAS publications for exporters and state departments of agriculture used them as sources of export assistance. It appears that only a small percentage of firms who know about the export-import bank use it as a source of export assistance. Chi-square tests re-

vealed that there is some association between firm size and the assistance from USDA agencies other than FAS, banks, marketing research firms, and other private firms with export experience as sources of export assistance. A greater percentage of large firms that know about these services actually use them than do small and medium size firms.

Use of Services by Export Experience

The percentages of new-to-export, moderately experienced exporters, and highly experienced exporters who knew about the export assistance services and used them are listed in Table IV. More than 75% of new-to-export firms who knew about freight forwarders as a source of export assistance sought assistance from them, while more than 90% of moderate and experienced exporters who were familiar with freight forwarders as a source of export assistance used them. More than 70% of all new to exporting, moderate exporters, and experienced who knew about state departments of agriculture as sources of export assistance used them to assist in their exporting efforts. Roughly 60% of new-to-export firms who were familiar with FAS publications used them to help with promotion and more than 65% of moderate exporters and experienced exporters who were familiar with FAS publications used them to help promote their products. The chi-square tests indicate that, of the firms who know about the export assistance services, there is some association between the firms' level of export experience and their use of FAS attaches, technical assistance, freight forwarders, banks, and other private firms with export experience as sources of export assistance. From Table IV, it appears that as firms become more experienced in exporting they tend to use these services more.

Conclusion

The results indicate that there is some association of firm size and the level of exporting experience with the knowledge and use of several sources of export assistance. Larger firms tend to have more knowledge about these services and use these ser-

Table 3. Use of Those Export Assistance Services Known About by Firm Size.

Service	Percent Used Service ^a			Chi-square
	Small	Medium	Large	
One-stop Information Service (Trade Assistance & Promotion Office or AgExport Action Kits)	37.84 (N1 = 37)	36.84 (N2 = 57)	35.71 (N3 = 14)	.022
Trade Leads, Buyer Alerts, or Buyer and Supplier Lists	56.25 (N1 = 48)	48.72 (N2 = 78)	63.16 (N3 = 19)	1.564
Trade Shows Organized by FAS	55.77 (N1 = 52)	62.50 (N2 = 88)	61.90 (N3 = 21)	.646
FAS Publications for Exporters (ex: Foreign Market Information Reports, AGExporter Magazine)	63.04 (N1 = 46)	67.09 (N2 = 79)	73.68 (N3 = 19)	.699
Direct Assistance from Overseas FAS Attaches	55.56 (N1 = 45)	55.71 (N2 = 70)	58.82 (N3 = 17)	.061
Technical Assistance (Import Requirements Information)	36.84 (N1 = 38)	49.12 (N2 = 57)	40.00 (N3 = 15)	1.491
USDA Agencies other than FAS	46.88 (N1 = 32)	72.55 (N2 = 51)	62.50 (N3 = 16)	5.538 ^b
State Departments of Agriculture	72.22 (N1 = 54)	71.25 (N2 = 80)	85.00 (N3 = 20)	1.605
Federal Agencies Other than USDA (ex: Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration)	46.94 (N1 = 49)	46.05 (N2 = 76)	41.18 (N3 = 17)	.174
State Agencies Other than Agriculture (ex: State Department of Commerce or Economic Development)	46.51 (N1 = 43)	44.29 (N2 = 70)	36.84 (N3 = 19)	.507
Chamber of Commerce	32.56 (N1 = 43)	31.43 (N2 = 70)	46.67 (N3 = 15)	1.317
Export-import Bank (EXIM Bank)	6.98 (N1 = 43)	21.87 (N2 = 64)	17.65 (N3 = 17)	4.254
World Trade Centers or Associations	38.00 (N1 = 50)	42.19 (N2 = 64)	38.89 (N3 = 18)	.219
Freight Forwarders	79.63 (N1 = 54)	90.59 (N2 = 85)	85.00 (N3 = 20)	3.352
Export Trading/Management Companies	43.14 (N1 = 51)	46.84 (N2 = 79)	50.00 (N3 = 20)	.319
Banks	47.06 (N1 = 51)	65.43 (N2 = 81)	68.42 (N3 = 19)	5.090 ^b
Marketing Research Firms	15.38 (N1 = 52)	18.52 (N2 = 81)	55.00 (N3 = 20)	14.482 ^c
Private Firms With Export Experience	28.85 (N1 = 52)	47.06 (N2 = 85)	66.67 (N3 = 18)	8.920 ^d
Foreign Government Agencies	26.83 (N1 = 41)	41.18 (N2 = 68)	46.67 (N3 = 15)	2.926
National Trade Data Bank	31.25 (N1 = 32)	20.00 (N2 = 40)	30.00 (N3 =)	1.296

^aN1, N2, and N3 are the number of responses in each size category.

^bsignificant at .10 probability.

^csignificant at .01 probability.

^dsignificant at .05 probability.

Table 4. Use of Those Export Assistance Services When Known About by Firm's Export Experience Level.

Service	Percent Used Service ^a			Chi-square
	New-to-Export	Moderately Experienced	Highly Experienced	
One-stop Information Service (Trade Assistance & Promotion Office or AgExport Action Kits)	43.24 (N1 = 37)	45.83 (N2 = 24)	27.66 (N3 = 47)	3.180
Trade Leads, Buyer Alerts, or Buyer and Supplier Lists	55.56 (N1 = 54)	47.06 (N2 = 34)	54.39 (N3 = 57)	.667
Trade Shows Organized by FAS	60.00 (N1 = 60)	64.71 (N2 = 34)	58.21 (N3 = 67)	.400
FAS Publications for Exporters (ex: Foreign Market Information Reports, AGExporter Magazine)	60.38 (N1 = 53)	66.67 (N2 = 30)	72.13 (N3 = 61)	1.763
Direct Assistance from Overseas FAS Attaches	41.67 (N1 = 48)	61.54 (N2 = 26)	65.52 (N3 = 58)	6.460 ^b
Technical Assistance (Import Requirements Information)	25.00 (N1 = 40)	42.11 (N2 = 19)	58.52 (N3 = 51)	10.449 ^c
USDA Agencies other than FAS	54.05 (N1 = 37)	70.00 (N2 = 20)	66.67 (N3 = 42)	1.919
State Departments of Agriculture	71.93 (N1 = 57)	74.29 (N2 = 35)	74.19 (N3 = 62)	.097
Federal Agencies Other than USDA (ex: Department of Commerce, Small Business Administration)	45.45 (N1 = 57)	58.06 (N2 = 35)	39.29 (N3 = 62)	2.839
State Agencies Other than Agriculture (ex: State Department of Commerce or Economic Development)	36.96 (N1 = 46)	40.63 (N2 = 32)	51.85 (N3 = 54)	2.426
Chamber of Commerce	32.56 (N1 = 43)	32.14 (N2 = 28)	35.09 (N3 = 57)	.104
Export-import Bank (EXIM Bank)	13.64 (N1 = 44)	23.33 (N2 = 30)	14.00 (N3 = 50)	1.521
World Trade Centers or Associations	35.85 (N3 = 50)	32.00 (N2 = 25)	48.15 (N3 = 54)	2.537
Freight Forwarders	76.27 (N1 = 59)	91.18 (N2 = 34)	92.42 (N3 = 66)	7.729 ^b

(continued)

Export Assistance Services

Table 4. (Continued)

Service	Percent Used Service ^a			Chi-square
	New-to-Export	Moderately Experienced	Highly Experienced	
Export Trading/Management Companies	39.66 (N1 = 58)	42.86 (N2 = 28)	53.13 (N3 = 64)	2.359
Banks	48.21 (N1 = 56)	66.57 (N2 = 33)	66.13 (N3 = 62)	4.797 ^d
Marketing Research Firms	20.34 (N1 = 59)	21.87 (N2 = 32)	24.19 (N3 = 62)	.263
Private Firms With Export Experience	31.67 (N1 = 60)	40.63 (N2 = 32)	55.56 (N3 = 63)	7.258 ^b
Foreign Government Agencies	34.78 (N1 = 46)	28.57 (N2 = 28)	44.00 (N3 = 50)	1.999
National Trade Data Bank	29.41 (N1 = 34)	22.22 (N2 = 18)	23.33 (N3 = 30)	.448

^aN1, N2, and N3 are the number of responses in each size category.

^bsignificant at .05 probability.

^csignificant at .01 probability.

^dsignificant at .10 probability.

vices more. One such reason for this is that larger firms may have specialized personnel devoted solely to exporting activities, and therefore these firms have more working hours with which to seek out and acquire knowledge about these types of assistance services. It also appears that firms more experienced with exporting tend to be more familiar with, and use, these services more than firms less experienced. A reason for this might be that the longer a firm is in the business of exporting the more contacts the firm makes with these services and as the firm becomes more familiar with these assistance services the use of the services is increased. In summary, larger firms and firms which are experienced with exporting tend to be more knowledgeable about and use export assistance services more than those smaller and less experienced exporters.

If a future goal of export assistance programs is to attract firms into exporting or to provide special assistance to small firms,⁹ then these small and inexperienced firms should be made more aware of the services available to them. State and federal export assistance services should be marketed more towards these types of agribusinesses in order to increase their knowledge of such services. These agribusinesses should also be encouraged to seek assistance from other firms who have been successfully exporting for a number of years. Once the firms have been made aware of the services that are available then it is the job of the agency providing the service to make the use of the service as easy as possible so as to further encourage the firm to take advantage of the assistance available to them, and thus increasing the chances of successfully exporting their products.

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